

This week, the House of Representatives considered a series of immigration bills introduced by Judiciary Committee Chairman James Sensenbrenner of Wisconsin. Several of these overly narrow bills reflect a punitive, anti-immigrant, enforcement-only approach that fails to address the estimated 11 million undocumented workers currently in the United States.

The American immigration system is in need of comprehensive reform, but the bills that passed the House this week do not rise to the challenge and run counter to our basic American values of due process and vigilant protection of civil liberties. They harshly penalize hard-working, tax-paying individuals hired by U.S. employers, who occupy jobs most Americans prefer not to take.

[HR6094](#) would allow for the indefinite detention of immigrants. It also allows immigrants suspected to be “gang members” to be deported, even if they have not committed any crime. This creates a real potential for widespread racial and ethnic profiling.

[HR6095](#) would shift responsibility for the enforcement of federal immigration laws to local and state police. Many state and local law enforcement bodies adamantly opposed this legislation, as many immigrants and their loved ones would be afraid to report crimes to the police. As a result, dangerous situations will go unreported, criminals will roam free, and we will all be less safe.

Instead of a narrowly crafted, enforcement-only legislation, reform of our broken immigration system must take into account the economic realities at the root of the immigration flows we hope to regulate, as well as the human realities of undocumented workers currently in the U.S. As Frank Sharry of the National Immigration Forum [testified](#) to the Senate Judiciary Committee, we have the best chance to gain lasting control over immigration flows and restore confidence in the rule of law through comprehensive immigration reform.

One of the bills on the floor this week, the Border Tunnel Prevention Act ( [HR4830](#) ), begins to address our need for a secure border. This common sense bill creates serious penalties for those who construct, finance or use tunnels to smuggle individuals or goods into our country. I voted for this bill, and support the development of a secure border as part of a comprehensive immigration policy.

This bill is just the beginning of what we need, however, and it is critical that updates to our immigration policies not stop there. We need to develop a comprehensive immigration policy that will ensure secure borders and allow for immigrants to legally come to our country seeking a better life as our parents and grandparents once did.

## **Most vulnerable among us may lose the ability to vote**

If the so-called “ [Federal Election Integrity Act](#) ” becomes law, Americans would be required to produce proof of citizenship and photo identification before casting a ballot. As this New York Times [editorial](#) argued, this bill places a substantial burden on our constitutional right to vote, a right that is fundamental to our American democracy.

The new ID requirements would disproportionately impact racial and ethnic minorities, the elderly, individuals with disabilities, Americans living in rural areas and reservations, students, military personnel, the homeless, the displaced, and low-income people, who are all less likely to have a current photo ID or proof of citizenship. Judges have previously found this sort of disenfranchisement [unconstitutional](#) .

The bill essentially creates a 21st Century poll tax because of the cost in time navigating cumbersome government bureaucracies, and resources required to obtain proof of citizenship and other identification. For example, a replacement birth certificate can exceed \$40; a passport costs \$97. Replacement citizenship documents for naturalized Americans cost \$220.

This requirement would put states in violation of the [National Voter Registration Act of 1993](#) and the [Voting Right Act of 1965](#)

, which was reauthorized less than two months ago with diligent, bipartisan effort. Two of the twelve sponsors of the Federal Election Integrity Act, Representatives John Doolittle and Lynn Westmoreland, actually voted against reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act.

As Chair of the [Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus](#) , I am committed to protecting and strengthening the rights of all American citizens, and I am outraged that the Congress is not addressing the real problems we have with election fraud including:

- the purging of otherwise eligible voters from voter rolls

- acts of intimidation against minority voters
- tampering of registration forms by corrupt election officials
- electronic voting, which has repeatedly compromised the integrity of elections around the country.

There is so much more we could be doing, but instead this Congress seeks to suppress already low voter turnout, encourage anti-immigrant xenophobia, and burden states with yet another unfunded mandate.

We must demand greater responsibility from our elected officials. We must demand that Congress work hard to find real solutions to real problems. The time is now for a [New Direction](#) for America.